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ABSTRACT

Child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency have both been widely studied. While statistics on the number of cases of abuse or delinquency are quite high, they are considered conservative, and estimates of actual as opposed to reported cases are much higher. There are striking parallels between adolescent victimization and adolescent antisocial behavior and many researchers have associated one with the other. Although the victimization of adolescents has not been proven to cause antisocial behavior, the association between the two is both real and significant and cannot be dismissed in the study or prevention efforts of either. In order to better address adolescent victimization and delinquency, it is necessary to direct greater emphasis toward empirical research on delinquency and its relationship to adolescent maltreatment. Juvenile authorities need to be prepared to deal with both maltreatment and delinquency issues. The school needs to play a greater role in the identification and prevention of maltreatment and delinquency. Rather than being treated as criminals, delinquents should be recognized as victims of inadequate societal and family systems. Better counseling and follow-up of maltreated youth are needed to lower their risk of delinquency. Parents need to understand their role in maltreatment and in delinquency. While prevention is a major goal, more funding is needed for both research and program design. (NB)

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THE ADOLESCENT VICTIM OF CRIME AND DELINQUENCY

R. Barri Flowers

THE ISSUES of child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency have been widely studied over the years. There can be no doubt that each represents a serious obstacle to the optimal development of our youth. What has not been accorded nearly as much attention as it deserves is the relationship between these two phenomenons. The parallels of the victmization of adolescents and adolescent antisocial behavior are striking and can be seen below:

- °Both phenomena consist of heterogeneous definitions and interpretations that bring forth specific issues in the sociology of knowledge and the organization of society.
- °The two are symptomatic of inadequate social and personal control and cultural deviance.
- °They represent extreme patterns of behavior found among the "normal" population.
- °Each can be the direct cause of the other.
- °Adolescent mistreatment and delinquency are essentially culturally defined labels used to formally identify individuals who, for a variety of reasons, can not or will not conform to culturally accepted modes of behavior.
- °A similar pattern exists among reported incidents of delinquency and abuse/neglect, suggesting that both phenomena are cross-cultural, cross-racial, and tend to be represented on all social class levels.

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Deprivation and/or affluence have not been consistently proven to be causative in either.

- In both areas, a disproportionately high percentage of lower socioeconomic group cases reach the judicial system. The greater resources of the upper classes is a prominent factor in their lower percentage of justice system involvement in delinquency and adolescent victmization.
- Intergenerational characteristics have been associated with both phenomena.
- Parental disciplinary practices have been shown to be a factor in both adolescent abuse/neglect and juvenile delinquency.
- Both tend to have some correlation with the stability of the family (for instance, dysfunctional families) and the particular role of the victim or delinquent in the family.
- Characteristics of the adolescent in both areas have been linked to their behavior.
- The potential for maltreatment within the institutional system (policies, mental hospitals, foster homes, corrections) is great for both groups.
- Both adolescent phenomena face a similar denial of full rights and due process under the law.[1]

Because of the complexities of this parallelism, the extent to which they are dependent upon one another is difficult to

establish precisely. And yet the nature of noncomformity as it relates to adolescent behavior or the behavior towards adolescents strongly suggests that in either instance the adolescent is a victim.

Before we explore the correlation between the adolescent as a victim and delinquent, let us look briefly at some of the numbers attached to these phenomenas.

The Adolescent Victim

According to official data; 2,328 people between the ages of under 1 and 19 were murder victims in the U.S. in a recent year.[2] This represented 12.5 percent of the total murder victims nationwide that year. Sexual victimization of adolescents has been particularly difficult to assess due to the lack of a central recording system and definitional disputes. Estimates have been made annually of 4,000 cases of sexual assaults of youths in large urban areas,[3] a national average of 5,000 cases of father-daughter incest,[4] and 200,000 to 500,000 cases of sexual victimization of female children aged 4 to 14.[5] In one large city with advanced victim services, 24 percent of all sexual assaults were on youths under the age of 14,[6] and a victim survey reported that 30 male youths received emergency room treatment annually for sexual assaults.[7]

Most of our data on adolescent victimization centers on abuse and neglect. The number of child abuse and neglect case reports in the U.S. has increased annually from approximately

7,000 in 1967[8] to over 200,000 in 1974[9] to an estimated 1,007,658 in 1983.[10]

It is generally conceded that because of under reporting, most forms of adolescent victimization are likely considerably higher than official data or conservative estimates. Current estimates suggest that 5,000 youths are dying at the hands of parents each year;[11] whereas the total number of child abuse and neglect cases has been estimated to be upwards of 4 million annually.[12]

The Adolescent Delinquent

In 1985, persons under the age of 18 accounted for 20 percent of the Crime Index clearances in the U.S. (serious crimes solved on the basis of the arrest of at least one person, the charge, and an appearance in court). Youths comprised of 17.1 percent of all arrests and 31 percent of the serious crime arrests; the bulk of which were for property crimes.[13]

Among non Index (or less serious) crimes, youth arrests in 1985 numbered 100,353 for vandalism; 17,312 for liquor law violations; 80,391 for drug abuse violations; 139,970 for runaways; and 71,608 for curfew and loitering law violations.[14]

Similar to official statistics on adolescent victimization, reported juvenile crime is believed to represent only a fraction of all adolescent criminality. For instance, some estimates place the number of runaways annually at more than one million,[15] and adolescent prostitution and drug use among youths are believed to

have reached epidemic proportions.[16]

What do these various figures tell us about the relationship between the adolescent victim and the adolescent offender? Very little on the surface. However, the significance of the figures and how they relate to each other can be seen through a number of studies that associate one with the other.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MALTREATED ADOLESCENT AND DELINQUENCY

Adolescents who are victims of maltreatment or criminality have been shown to participate in a variety of delinquent activities including running away, family violence, violent crime, drug use, sexual misconduct, prostitution and pornography.[17] Many adolescents are thrown out of the house; one estimate placing the number of throwaways to be 40 percent of the nation's homeless youths.[18] Often these young people, victimized by their families, must turn to delinquency for survival. Conversely, studies have found many delinquent youths to be victims of broken homes, high crime neighborhoods, social class, poverty, excessive discipline, child abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, intergenerational maltreatment or criminality, and other childhood factors that may have influenced their delinquent disposition.[19]

M. R. Haskell and L. Yablonsky contend that juvenile institutions are filled with adolescents who were victims of child maltreatment and family pathology.[20] Brandt Steele cited a study in which an incredible 82 percent of a group of adolescent criminals were found to have a history of abuse and neglect and 43 percent recalled being rendered unconscious by a parent.[21] D. Lewis

and J. H. Pincus noted that violent adolescents had both witnessed and been victimized by severe physical abuse.[22]

Excessive physical discipline has been associated with aggressive, destructive delinquency in studies by E. Deykin[23] and M. F. Shore.[24] H. Simmons supported this approach by advancing that "a brutal parent tends to produce a brutal child."[25] He argued that the hostility a child feels towards brutal parents is transferred to the outside world in the form of delinquency.

James Garbarino points out the likelihood of a cause and effect relationship between juvenile delinquency and child abuse:

> Many abused children and youth attempt to avoid or escape their parents. In doing so they are likely to become involved in a variety of delinquent behaviors related to their status (unsupervised, uncared for minors), as well as their personal history (inadequate learning of social skills).[26]

Other studies have associated adolescent maltreatment and delinquency with intergenerational violence in the family. S. Glueck and E. Glueck advanced that parents of delinquents have consistently been described as possessing characteristics of delinquent behavior and emotional disturbances.[27] V. J. Fontana noted that the past history of abusive parents was characterized by parents who were brutal, cruel, and unloving.[28] A similar observance was forwarded by C. Ounstead and colleagues, whose data supported the contention that abusing parents often came from families where violence has existed through the generations.[29]

N. Polansky and associates' study of neglectful families shows "a generation-to-generation transference of a lifestyle of neglect that comes from the showing and passing on of family misfortunes,"[30] and W. McCord's concept of the "bad seed" further supports the violence breeds violence theory, in implying some sort of transmission of violent/deviant behavior from one generation to the next.[31]

The strong relationship between adolescent maltreatment and delinquency prompted D. W. Schmitt and C. H. Kempe to suggest firmly that action on the problem of the victimization of children will prevent crime.[32]

Critics of this correlation have argued about its validity, pointing out the delinquent youth who come from stable, non-abusive or non-violent backgrounds. R. W. Weinback and associates further contended that

> we would be both naive and grandoise if we were to assert that we can document a relationship of cause and effect when we attempt to associate delinquency and child abuse. . . .Furthermore. . .we cannot assume that all child abuse, as defined by rigid and perhaps culturally biased definitions, is motivated by sadism, frustration, or ignorance of human development.[33]

Despite such criticism, it is fairly evident that although the victimization of adolescents has not been proven to be in and of itself causal of youth antisocial behavior, the association between the two is both real and significant, and thus cannot be dismissed in the study, understanding, and prevention of either.

HOW DO WE BETTER ADDRESS ADOLESCENT VICTIMIZATION?

Because of the relationship between the adolescent victim and the adolescent offender, we must restructure our thinking when dealing with these issues. Neither can be presumed to be mutually exclusive of the other where it concerns the delinquent youth or the potential delinquency of a maltreated adolescent. The following recommendations are designed to further our comprehension of these parallel phenomenons of our youth:

- Greater emphasis must be directed toward empirical research on delinquency and its relationship to adolescent maltreatment.
- Juvenile authorities need to be better educated and coordinated when dealing with the mistreatment of youth and juvenile delinquency, both as separate and related issues.
- The school needs to play a greater role in the detection and prevention of both phenomena.
- Delinquents should not be treated as criminals as much as victims of an inadequate society and family system.
- Better counseling and follow-up studies of maltreated adolescents is needed if we are to lower the rate of victims turned delinquents.
- Parents need more education in recognizing the signs of their own errors of ommission in contributing to adolescent delinquency.

- Prevention of susceptibility to adolescent maltreatment and juvenile delinquency must be one of our most important goals.
- More funding is needed to both study these issues and create programs designed to prevent their occurrence.

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16. Ibid., pp. 134-136, 139.

17. Ibid.

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